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Ó Domhnaill Abú

IN HOC SIGNO VINCES

O Donnell Clan Newsletter No. 21

Winter 1993

Re-roofing of Donegal Castle still in progress.

Obituaries

It is with the greatest regrets I report the demise during the summer of two very prominent members of the O'Donnell Clan Association, i.e. Eddie O'Donnell, former Chairman and Danny 'Minnie' O'Donnell, serving vice-chairman.

Those present at the '89 Clan Gathering will remember 'Big Eddie' presiding at all functions. During that same year he was Chairperson of the Donegal County Council and wore his chain of office with pride at all official functions, includuing the Clan Rally.

Eddie O'Donnell

It was Eddie who initiated that same Clan Rally and was the driving force behind it all the way, securing sponsership and funding, providing facilities such as toilets at the Rock of Doon etc. He did everything within his power as Chairman of the County Council to ensure a successful Gathering and was not disappointed. To add to his difficulties a General Election was taking place at the same time and Eddie being a committed politian had to do his share in that field as well. Eddie, though no longer Chairperson of the Clan Association, again gave his fullest support to the '92 Gathering.

It was on the 2nd June while travelling to a wake that he met his sudden death in a road accident outside the Sligo village of Grange. Eddie, who was 46, was a native of Killmacrennan and was married with six of a family - three boys and three girls. His wife, Anne, has since taken his place in the Donegal County Council. We sympathise with her and the family and wish her all the best in her new career.

Danny 'Minnie' O'Donnell

Those who attended the '92 Clan Gathering will remember the beautiful meal served by Danny 'Minnie' O'Donnell and his wife, Terry, in Killindarragh House, Annagry on the day of the bus tour. Indeed, it was talked about for days afterwards. Danny was very much involved in both the '89 and '92 Gatherings. A man of great ideas, he was always striving to make every event a prestigious and impressive occasion.

During the last Gathering he put on a brave face even though he was only out of hospital after an operation and every movement of his body was painful not to mention the journey to and from Donegal Town.

Danny, married with five of a family, lived in Annagry where he, as well as being on the managerial staff of Udras na Gaeltachta in Gweedore, ran a family restaurant. Killindarragh House has for long been known far and wide as offering cusine of the highest quality, nothing less would be accepted by Danny.

Having fought with the dreaded cancer for some time he died on the 23rd August and was buried in the local graveyard. Our sympathies go out to Terry and their family.

Both funerals were attended by members of the O'Donnell Clan Association and as a mark of respect and honour on both occasions the coffin was draped in the O'Donnell Standard and a floral wreath in the design and colours of the Clan arms placed on the grave. Both Eddie and Danny will be very much missed by the O'Donnell Clan Association, we have so few of their calibre. Ar dheis De go raibh a n-anamnacha!

Ben O'Donnell selected as Coach of the Year

Mr. Ben O'Donnell, Lifford A.C. coach, right, receiving the Irish Coach of the Year award at the National B.L.E. Coaching Conference in Limerick recently from Jim Kilty, Irish Director of Coaching. Ben received this prestigious award because of his success with Sharon Foley who broke the Irish high jump record on two occasions this year and qualified to compete in the World Athletic Championship in Stuttgart in August and also qualified for the European Championships in Helsinki next year with a leap of 1.88m (6 ft. 2 ins.)

Clinton's lost empire

JOINING the ranks of world leaders who have benefited from a Catholic education (Fidel Castro, General Pinochet, Ferdinand Marcos . . .) Bill Clinton confidently takes the world stage this week.

An intriguing story about Clinton's school days reaches me. One former teacher, Mgr John O'Donnell, remembers eight-year-old Willy (as he was then known) after a class on the fall of the Roman Empire. "He said if he had been emperor, Rome wouldn't have fallen."

President Clinton: confident pupil

Died at 114

THE death has occurred of Mr Bryan O'Donnell, farmer, Thowar, Inver, Co Donegal, at the great age of 114.

Deceased, whose faculties remained unimpaired to the last, could speak only the Irish language.

TALL CLAIM

The genealogists and history writers have had a big doubt cast on their conclusions, which cannot any longer be relied upon if a man called O'Donnell, a native-born Australian, gets his way. The O'Donnelll clan genealogy is all wrong, and those who claim to be living links, especially those in Austria and Spain, had better look to their laurels if they are not to be ousted by this man. He is J. B. A. O'Donnell, who claims that he is the rightful chieftan of Tirconaill, and he is fully bent on putting his claim to a big test towards the end of the year. Writing to me from 75 Sydney Street, New Farm, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, he starts with greetings in Irish, and goes on:

> "I am the direct descentant of John, elder brother of Red Hugh. I am the rightful owner of the Donegal Castle and lands appertaining to same. I am also the owner of the most priceless pearls in the world, "The O'Donnell Pearls", now resting in the vault of a London Bank which refuses to hand them over. I am returning to Donegal to take possession of my ancestral home, Donegal Castle, in December 1984. I have informed the Eire Government of my intention and they have not opposed it. After my return to Donegal then it will be up to the people of all Ireland and Scotland and the Gaels and Celts of the other **Islands** to declare by referendum whether they enthusiastically want me as their Ard Riogh. This is the only way that lasting peace and prosperity will come to Ireland and the whole of Europe. I am an expert economist and have a full and detailed plan for a new economic system for Ireland and Europe. Will you be pleased to put my case to the people in your estimable newspaper and then let the people voice their assent or dissent. Let there be peace and unity on our sacred soil. Will you please inform me as to whether there may be any local inconvenience to anyone by my coming to reside in the Castle, my ancestral home. The story about the O'Donnell pearls — in full detail — I will send you if and when you tell me to do so.
>
> Yours for a united Ireland,
>
> John O'Donnell,
>
> Chieftain of Tirconnaill.

That's as far as the story goes, so I leave it to readers to draw their own conclusions on the O'Donnell succession, and on this resurrecting of an ages-old issue concerning the real ownership of the Castle, its ground, and the "O'Donnell pearls". There could be trouble brewing, and the pages of history may have to be rewritten. Who knows?

These clippings were taken from the following:- Top left: Donegal Deomcrat 21/10/1993 and features Ben, Secretary of the Clan Association; Bottom left: Donegal Democrat 17/8/1984; Top right: The Universe 17/1/1993; Bottom right: The Irish News 15/3/1913. V. O'D.

THE O'DONNELLS AND THEIR HERALDRY
by Patrick O'Kelly de Conejera.
Continued from ODA No. 20.

Irish Personal Arms

With the breakdown of the Clan structure, which would have evolved in due course had it not been imposed, the collective protection of the Clan Arms was lost and its leading families needed personal arms to represent their personal authority as they went their different ways. In fact as the Clan lost its collective nature so their situation approached that of the continental Nobility, and their new heraldic requirements were met by continental heraldic law.

The Anglo-Norman influence in the development of these personal arms is over-emphasised from the availability of their records, whereas little positive evidence remains of the probably greater influence of the Irish Officers in Continental Service and the many Irish priests trained in Spain. As is clear in Archbishop Bruno Heim's book, 'Heraldry in the Catholic Church' they would have regarded heraldry as a fundamental aspect of education in their day, inseparable from birth, marriage, death and inheritance.

In any event the continuity of Irish heraldic tradition was, and is still maintained by the use of personal arms relating to those of the Clan, with differences as for a younger son on the general basis that the more obscure the relationship the greater the difference.

The O'Donnell Representation

The use of arms in the Irish tradition by the O'Donnells needs consideration of the manner in which the Clan can be represented in modern life: and there is little point in forming an Association on the same basis as, say, stamp collectors or sportsmen.

The loss of territorial power may give the impression that the O'Donnells ceased to exist as a Clan, but in fact the bulk of its members remain and the loss is really one of cohesion. To the extent that they have restored this cohesion the Clan Gatherings of recent years have the same rights and responsibilities as those of earlier centuries, but it remains to restore the Clan structure.

Thus there must be a recognised Chief of Noble descent, with both the ability and enthusiasm to be effective as such; and foreign rules of primogeniture should never take precedence over our own traditions in this respect. The inauguration of a Chief arose from selection by the Nobility and acclamation of all the Freeborn of the Clan, and this tradition could well be followed today. Equally the O'Donnells have an inherent right to proclaim their Chief as Prince of Tirconnell, and it is surely inconceivable that any Irish law should suppress this heritage.

The term Nobility may have acquired connotations to arouse suspicion, but it is an essential part of Clan tradition, and it would be absurd to allow sentiments arising from historical conflictions to detract from our own traditions. Thus in accordance with the ancient Brehon Laws the O'Donnell Nobility of today is represented both by the heirs of the great families of the past and those who have achieved prominence and demonstrated their nobility of character. For example a priest was regarded in Continental heraldic law as noble by office, and this category can be extended to others who serve the community in an outstanding manner.

Titles of nobility did not exist in the Clans, although those conferred by other Kings were always respected, but this status was indicated by a territorial suffix to the name, and the Clan could well grant this honour to those it thought fit.

The third category of the Aires or Privileged People, the Freeborn with substantial property, present no problems in modern terms since they can be envisaged as those whose circumstances permit them to take a more active part in the Clan administration than the bulk of its members.

The fourth class of Freeborn O'Donnells can equally be represented by Association Members whose support for the Clan is both effective and acceptable, which follows the principles of the old Brehon Laws; leaving those lacking interest or acceptability as the Unfree in this context.

This structure, whereby the Clan was governed by its Chief and the Aires class, into which any of the Freeborn who were worthy might be admitted,

served its purpose for over a thousand years and is equally applicable to such purposes as may be decided for the future. These might include the fostering of Clan tradition and fellowship; Gatherings and perhaps charitable activities in Donegal, and the rebuilding of the Castle as a Clan Centre.

Heraldic Principles

It is within the Clan structure that Irish heraldry can be developed in accordance with its most ancient traditions, but since arms have become an honour comparable with a University degree it follows that they must be granted by an appropriate authority.

Our Authority is the Chief Herald of Ireland, a Government Official in Dublin responsible for certifying arms and pedigrees for those of Irish descent, and while he lacks the power of his Scottish counterpart to punish those guilty of unlawful heraldic display we have a clear moral responsibility to conform to his authority.

Throughout history, however, Heralds have had an international diplomatic character, concerned with common heraldic laws and the recognition of arms regardless of any political divisions. Thus each accepts the authority of other duly appointed Heralds, and the validity of arms used in Ireland may be derived from Grants from such as the Lord Lyon King of Arms of Scotland; Norroy and Ulster King of Arms, or other Heralds under the Earl Marshal of England; or the Cronista Rey de Armas of Spain.

There is no tradition whereby the Chief of the O'Donnells might grant arms, apart from the practical requirement to avoid duplication which can only be ensured by the Chief Herald, but it would be an asset to have an O'Donnell Pursuivant, a subordinate Officer of Arms, to record Arms properly used by O'Donnells and co-ordinate the Clan interests in this sphere.

The O'Donnell Arms

To deal with the actual usage of O'Donnell Arms, the red hand-held Cross on a golden shield or banner represents the Clan as a whole, for display at any Gathering, or to be flown over the Castle if restored to their possession. The Chief alone has a personal right to these arms, as The O'Donnell and the Clan Representative, although he may have additional arms with inherited differences or quarters to be passed on to his heirs.

Thus no other O'Donnells have any right to use these arms as their own, although their display, as the personal arms of the Pope are sometimes displayed in affection, is a different matter; but this display should avoid the personal style of arms which in effect would proclaim, 'I am The O'Donnell' rather than , 'I am an O'Donnell'.

The style of personal arms may vary considerably according to their national background and status, but in general terms the shield is surmounted by a helmet, with a wreath or coronet and a Crest above; a term which is often misapplied to the arms as a whole. Decorative mantling emerges from below the wreath or coronet, and there may be human or animal figures, known as supporters, either side, representing a greater honour.

It is unfortunate that most 'Clan Arms' sold commercially should be embellished in this style, which completely misrepresents their meaning in an attempt to make them look more impressive. In fact arms displayed in token of loyalty to the Clan or its Chief should be on a shield free of any exterior ornamentation, or a circular plaque in the old Irish tradition recorded by the Poet Spencer; 'The Irish with their round shields in rude colours', rude meaning vigorous and bright rather than rough!

It is among the Nobility of the Clan that personal arms are of the greatest importance, and the greater the status of the Clan the more personal arms should be displayed at its Gatherings; indicating the extent to which its members have merited this honour over the centuries. Hence diffidence in using inherited arms, or among those who lead the Clan in obtaining a grant, is a denial of the honour of the Clan rather than a modest virtue.

With regard to the third category of the arms of Privileged People there is general agreement among all heraldic traditions that the Nobility must bear arms as an essential attribute, but there are different opinions on the degree to which those who bear arms should be regarded as Nobles, and this

(continued on page 5)

O'DONNELL CONNECTIONS.
by Conor Sinclair.

The above photo shows Willie O'Donnell and his mother, Hannah, outside their home in Mobarnan, near Moyglass, Co. Tipperary.

The house they live in is the former Royal Irish Constabulary Police Station of Mobarnan.

It was in this area on the 4th Dec. 1840 that two pigs were stolen from Mr. James Cooney. John Kelly was arrested for this offence and held in Mobarnan Police Station - now the O'Donnell home.

Kelly was tried at Clonmel Assizes beginning 1st Jan. 1841, convicted and sentenced to 7 years transportation in Van Diemen's Land. He arrived there 2nd Jan. 1842.

In 1841 the Quinn family from Ballymena, Co. Antrim arrived at Port Philip Bay 600 miles south of Sydney. John Kelly on his release made his way to Victoria where he worked as a travelling labourer. Here he met and fell in love with the Quinn's eldest daughter, Nelly. Not getting her parents' approval the couple eloped and were married on 18th Nov. 1850.

In June 1855 a son was born at Beveridge, 24 miles north of Melbourne. He was called Edward after his uncle in far-off Tipperary but, in the Irish style, became known as Ned.

Cooney's two pigs were to cost the Colony of Victoria dear and Ned Kelly was to become the best known person born in Australia. When he died on the scaffold at Melbourn Jail on 11th Nov. 1880 it was only 40 years since the two pigs had been stolen on the slopes of Slievenaman in Tipperary at the other end of the world.

Willie O'Donnell of Mobarnan, Tipperary has another claim to fame. In the late 1980's he bought a horse at the Dublin Sales. Having kept it for three years he sold it to a trainer. That horse, 'Cnoc-na-Cuille' was, in 1988, ridden to victory by the Princess Royal at a Worcester National Hunt meeting. Towards the end of that season Princess Anne rode Cnoc-na-Cuille at Warrick when, just after the race, the horse collapsed and died.

(continued from page 4)

may depend on the nature of the original Grant. Never-the-less arms are a representation of Leadership, and the Freeborn with substantial property who took part in the Clan administration were among its leaders. Hence they should bear arms, and those who fall into this category today should be encouraged to petition for a Grant if they lack any inheritance.

The Freeborn with substantial property may appear comparable with the rich Merchants of the Continent, who developed Burgher Arms of lesser value than those of the Nobility, but there is no real basis in any such comparison. The Merchants had little if any relationship with the Nobles and were regarded as inferior, however rich.

The question of the fourth class of Freeborn forming the bulk of the Clan remains, and accepting their rights as Urrad to display some symbol of their honourable status within the Clan it is contrary to both Clan tradition and heraldic law that they should all bear personal arms.

(continued in next issue)

Aodh Mac Aodh Dubh of Ramelton
by Seamus Mac Aoidh.

Aodh Mac Aodh Dubh, or Aodh Og Dubh as he is sometimes called, was the greatest of the Ramelton O'Donnells. A brother of Manus the 21st Chieftain, he appears as No. 3 on the genealogical chart in ODA No. 2 and is mentioned briefly on p. 4 ODA No. 8. Described as "Glun deirneach gaiscidh Gael" or "The Achilles of the Irish Race" he was very partial to fast horses. His own horse and those of his cavalry, according to tradition, had to be: "...big, sound, young, noble, high-headed, load-carrying, lively-hearted, broad-breasted, haughty, easy-bearing, sleek..." Then to discover if the horse was "....perfectly sound, easy-ridden, obedient..." the animal, bearing the rider, was made to swim across the Lennon about opposite the castle (where the river is widest). The horse that dashed most daringly into the stream and swam across the quickest was chosen.

Aodh was junior, almost certainly, to his stepbrother, Manus, who was inaugurated Chieftain in 1537. It is highly unlikely that Aodh became Tanist then as historians estimate that he was only a child of one year of age at the time. When eventually he became Tanist and was in direct line for the title of Chief he was unfortunately forstalled by An Calbhach(4) who had Manus his father imprisoned and himself elevated to the position of Chief. When An Calbhach died suddenly in 1566 Aodh must surely have thought his opportunity had come to be declared An Dalach. But to his disappointment, Aodh Dubh(5) or Aodh Mac Manus succeeded as Taoiseach. Aodh was disappointed once more when Aodh Dubh resigned in favour of his son Red Hugh(12). When Red Hugh died in Spain nobody had the political clout to nominate the Ramelton hero. In the following year Niall Garbh(16) took advantage of the political vacuum and disarray that followed Kinsale and had himself unofficially inaugurated.

Three times the opportunity arose and three times was Aodh snubbed. Even the English by-passed his just claim when they created Rory(13) Earl of Tirconnell.

When Red Hugh was inaugurated Aodh refused to attend the ceremony at the Rock of Doon, but later mollified and offered his fealty to the young Chieftain. It was important to Red Hugh to have the Ramelton man on his side for it was said of him:

"This Aodh mac Aodha Duibh was a distinguished noble. He was a handsome good-looking man, a well brought up knowledgeable person of fine physique; he was experienced in the best manners of that time, pleasant in peace and brave in battle. He was a generous host, amiable with his neighbours, ferocious in fight, harsh with the enemy yet humane with them in victory. His name was on everyone's lips throughout Ireland and his characteristics were compared with those of the great. It was said of him that he had the acumen of Lubhaidh Lamhfhada, was as skilled in the weapons of war as Cuchulainn, as deadly in battle as Conall Cearnach, as good a horse-rider as Troilus, son of Priam. During his lifetime he had never suffered defeat either in battle or single combat."

When Red Hugh began his campaign against the English he had the full support of the Ramelton man. Aodh of Ramelton had proven his worth in battle before when he assisted Red Hugh's father at Farcetmore(see ODA No. 13 *) in 1567. However, in spite of Aodh's many attributes Sean Og O'Doherty was the one Red Hugh chose as second-in-command followed by Niall Garbh(16). The Maguire was put in charge of cavalry. Did Red Hugh consider him too old at 60 or did he not trust him?

Aodh Mac Aodh Dubh must have accompanied Red Hugh on his many raiding expeditions into Connaught. The story is told in the Ramelton neighbourhood that he was once captured by the enemy when he outrode his cavalry while pursuing the defeated and, in his haste, found himself trapped alone in Sligo Castle. Aodh's fame as a horseman had evidently preceeded him for the Captain of the Guard, himself a horseman of note, challenged him to a 'duel' in horsemanship. Aodh would accept the challenge on one condition only, that his son be contacted and told to bring to the castle his 'lean swift steed'. His wish was complied with and one

bright morning son and horse arrived. Aodh mounted and sped around the yard putting on such show of horsemanship as the company had never seen. Then while the English were still enjoying the dexterity and skill of horse and rider, Aodh pulled his son up behind him and made the horse clear the prison wall and sped to freedom. How much truth there is in that story I cannot say.

'With one great leap they cleared the wall,
The jail left far behind,
With mouth agape the sergeant stood -
The feat had stunned his mind;
Too late to chase the flying hooves,
Too late the bugle call,
For back once more to Lennon shore
Sped Hugh of Donegal.'

Once while accompanying Red Hugh in Connacht, Sir Henry Docwra ensconsed himself and his men in Culmore from whence he made many damaging forays on the surrounding territory of Inishowen. When Red Hugh returned he chose a large body of soldiers and a troop of horse(Aodh of Ramelton was among the latter). The English grazed their horses outside the city of Derry and Red Hugh resolved to capture the horses thus rendering the English incapacitated. "In the darkness of the night" Red Hugh prepared an ambush leaving the main body hiding in a gorge of a steep cliff on the mountain slope to the north of the city while he placed a few of his cavalry beside the city gates.

Early in the morning as the horses were being brought out to the fields O'Donnell's horsemen vigorously attacked the drovers and made off with the horses. Immediately the alarm was raised in the city Docwra and those of his men still with horses gave chase. As Red Hugh reached the gorge he ordered the horses to be taken to a secure place while he and the rest of his men gave battle to the pursurers.

The fighting was furious. According to the Four Masters Hugh of Ramelton "made a well-aimed cast of a javelin at the General, Sir Henry Docwra, and striking him directly in the forehead, wounded him very severely. When the General was thus pierced, he turned back; and the English, seeing their chief, their adviser, and their mighty man, wounded, returned home in sorrow and disgrace, and pursued their horses no further."

Aodh's castle at Ramelton was built by Neachtain O'Donnell, Chief of Tir Chonaill(1439-'52) for one of his sons, possibly Ruadhrai(1452-'54). Docwra, in writing of this castle says:

"It is the meetest and most commodious of any other upon the neck of the country and for the defence thereof."

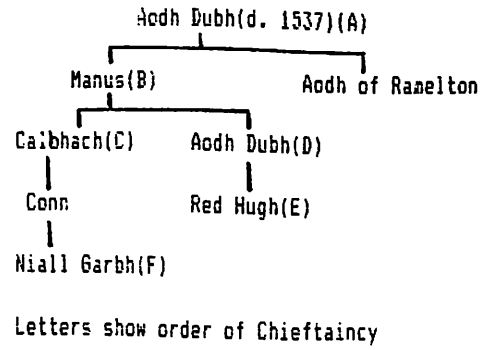
The castle fell to Docwra in 1601. Aodh's attempt to regain it failed. However, under the Plantation of Ulster, he received his castle back along with a grant of 1,000 acres of his own land for life. The rest of his land went to the planters as did the rent thereof.

When he died around 1618 Aodh Mac Aodha Duibh was an octogenarian and had witnessed many hapless scenes that blotted the North-Western landscape. The abrupt and uneasy transition from the old order to the new and the chill foreign wind that blew along the corridors of the Gaelic world brought nothing but dispondency and lost hope. When Aodh died, with him died the last remaining hope of the Gael.

* While editing this article I became aware of an error in ODA No.13. On page 7, paragraph 5, "He had sent his horsemen under the command of his son Hugh" should be "He had sent his horsemen under the command of his uncle Hugh."

Taoiseach: Chief.

Taniste: Second-in-command, heir presumptive, deputy Chief.



Letters show order of Chieftaincy

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